

July 1998 Pileup

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Presidential Ponderings

Welcome to summer, with lots of great (meaning HOT) days to work on outdoor projects. Sometimes, it seems, the days are too hot, there are too many afternoon storms, and too many other-than-ham-radio-things going on.

I hope everyone had a safe, enjoyable Fourth of July. I'm back from 12 days in Israel, having had a great time experiencing history first-hand. While I was gone, we suffered another glitch in the Young Mountain equipment. At this writing (July 6th), the gear is powered down. N5BI promises to get to the bottom of the problem, so look for it to be back up again soon. Our heartfelt thanks to Gary for his efforts with the Young Mountain site.

And now that I'm back home, I will be devoting some more time to the UHF radios. Thanks to everyone who put down a deposit on one of these Motorola radios. Thanks also for your patience. I promise good news in the very near future. (If you want a radio, and have not paid your \$125, contact me via e-mail, using k4md@juno.com and we'll see what can be done to get you a UHF data radio.)

I recently spent some an early working morning up on my tower; I'm sure many of you will be doing likewise. Please, work safely; eat a banana before you climb-the potassium keeps your muscles from cramping. (When you're getting "up in years," you need all your parts working right when you're 120 feet in the air!)

We welcome K4BVQ back to the PacketCluster. Franks's running a shiny new computer and TNC and it's good to see his call on the Cluster again. Now, let's work on world-renowned neighbor, K4SQR, and get him equipped for digital news, too!

CDXA has a meeting coming up; I look forward to seeing you there. (Details are elsewhere in The Pileup.) Again, thanks to all those who serve our common good in the hobby. Don't forget to check out the CDXA weekly luncheons at Shoney's on Woodlawn and South Boulevard-every Wednesday, starting around 11:30. Hope to see you there!

73 Joe K4MD

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Editorial

This month, we consider TIME for editorializing. It's big, it's infinitely more interesting than simply talking about the latest offering from Kenwood or Icom, it's way cool....

I thought about time as a youngster, leaning how to "tell it" from my Mother. It was a secret, I was sure-a carryover from some definite past and place. I watched the hands on the mantle clock, hoping to see them move. I was certain their Roman numerals carried a message I would one day unlock. When I finally could, I would always announce the time completely, when asked: "It's four o'clock." Never simply four, or four twenty. It was always, "It's four o'clock," or, "It's twenty minutes past four o'clock." I haven't heard that expression in years. A fault or result, I presume, of the ever-widening digital age.

A few minutes research into time and time-keeping will reward you with an array of titles to see you through the summer reading session. It suffices here to remember that for 500 years, we got along fine with analog time and timepieces, simply one or two "hands" circling a face with 12 hours marked on it. But in 1970, the Hamilton Watch Company introduced the Pulsar, the first digital wristwatch. Priced about the same as a Chevy Vega (around \$2100), digital time-keeping was off and running, in a big way. The best-selling watch in America today is Timex's Triathlon, which you can even see on President Clinton's tuxedoed wrist, if you look closely enough. Sure, they're cheap, reliable, and snappy looking. Maybe you even buy into the preciseness of them. ("It's 4:28.") Texas Instruments used to advertise their products as providing "exact seconds," a wonderful selling concept, for Americans love numbers. Patton should have said that, but batting averages, Nielsen ratings, stock market prices, interest rates, and the body weight index weren't yet so popular. Digital anything, with those precise numbers, is less open to interpretation, thus more reliable, true and trustworthy.

You see this belief in politics; you see this belief in radio, too. Where the numbers are always the best part of the review-what's quoted and remembered. But, numbers alone will not get us where we're going (neither the ship of state or the latest DX pileup). Writers, too, focus on the race-the results, not motivation or skill. The questionable precision of the clock, that's what we should remember, and think about. We should consider ALL the variables. We should go back, searching for the context that digital time (and dials) have caused us to lose sight of. (Think about the root "numb" as you recite those numbers all the time....)

As life becomes more complicated, Americans all like a watch (and their tuning dials) that give them the exact time, date, (or frequency). I'm heading back to Humpty Dumpty, myself, who said: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more or less." I like the idea that I'm

choosing what I want 4:28 to mean (or 14.025, regardless of what's displayed on my TS-830). Sooner, or maybe later, we'll come back to this semantic point of departure. Right now, it's 9:24, time to print this page!

--[K4ZA](#)

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Propagation Info For Dummies

Those times when you think to listen to WWV (18 minutes past the hour), do you really know what the data you get means? Mostly, folks think if the solar flux is high and the A-index is low, that things are peachy keen neat. Right? Here are some details, in a current book-craze format:

The solar flux is a number from about 60 to over 200 indicating the degree of ionization of the F layer. The daily number's important, but long-term cycle changes determine major propagation changes. (60 is probably about the bottom of a cycle; numbers of 150 and above mean 10/15 will be hopping; numbers over 200 mean 6-meter folks will be happy with F-skip.

The A-index is a number from 0-400 which indicates the solar activity of the previous 24 hours. The A-index is important because if solar activity is high and the absorption (A-index) is up, then you will not be able to use the high flux effectively. The lower the number, the better, although higher latitudes are affected more than those close to the equator. (Meaning, say, with a flux of 180 and an A-index of 20, the US/Asia path won't be there, but you should still find US/VK/ZL openings.) The A-index is derived from eight successive three-hourly K-indices, giving an indication of how disturbed the geomagnetic field has been over a 24-hour period.

The K-index relates to the A, being a measure of the geomagnetic field over the previous six hours, usually reflecting storm activity. The K-index seldom rises over five. The K-index is also quasi-logarithmic-meaning it's obtained by determining the maximum deviation from the quiet day curve of the most disturbed component of the geomagnetic field. It's probably the most useful thing to look at, for a quick view when you wonder what the bands are doing.

Solar activity means what's happening on the sun's surface-ranging from very low to very high. Low to moderate is best-meaning the flux is up, while the A- and K-indexes are down. The geomagnetic field activity results from this solar activity-ranging from quiet to unsettled to active and it follows a K-index of 0-1, 1-3, and 4+.

Following these figures from WWV is always interesting-especially when the solar activity is high. When flares occur, for instance, and the geomagnetic field reacts immediately with storm conditions within 24 hours, VHF addicts can look for aurora. If you can't check WWV every day, W1AW's Monday bulletin will tell you what's happened, with a prediction of what's going to happen. Complete WWV propagation details can be obtained from the National Bureau of Standards-simply ask for publication #432.

In keeping with this brief treatise, N4UH sent along the latest cycle 23 update from the Space Environment Center, which includes the following news: "...activity is rising as expected...toward a

maximum predicted for early in 2000...with the majority of events expected during the period 1999-2003. The predicted smoothed value for the sunspot number at maximum is 160, and the 10.7 cm solar flux is expected to reach 205...." Most of us, of course, can hardly wait.

[-K4ZA](#)

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The Hamvention Revisited

An annual rite of spring is over. The 1998 Dayton Hamvention has come and gone. In the Carolinas, the event passed more or less unnoticed, as few area amateurs made the pilgrimage to Buckeye land. Here's a report.

First, the weather was great, with temperatures at record highs (93 on Thursday). This should set to rest once and for all those critics who say the event should be rescheduled in April, as it once was. N4ZC and K4ZA managed to get there in less than eight hours. (One day, they hope to be able to fly.) We grabbed a quick nap, dinner, then headed to the Crowne Plaza and the ever-popular hospitality suites. These suites are the REAL REASON active, hard-driving contesters and DXers go to Dayton. They are incomparable. Gathered together, in one place, the "cream of the crop" in the contest and DX world. There's simply nothing like it. (The only down side is the smoke-from those who insist on forming their habit inside the hotel.) I spent most of the evening gathering video interview footage for my contest video essay. Rog helped, and the isolation didn't seem to slow his enjoyment down one bit. We hung on until a little after 2:00 AM. Up bright and early Friday (the first official Hamvention day, we breakfasted at The Waffle House, one of the few Dayton area merchants who actually embrace the event (their employees ALL wear special Waffle House Hamvention tee-shirts), then headed to Hara Arena). Parking is always an issue-which is true for any situation where you've got tens of thousands of folks gathered. We managed to pay our \$5.00 to walk seemingly halfway in from Springfield. Only the flea market was open; the inside exhibit hall opened at noon. (I believe there are 4,051 flea market spaces-in case you're wondering. The odds are: if you can't find it at Dayton, you probably don't need it.) I immediately bought the Amphenol connectors I needed from The RF Connection guys, then walked around. Rog sought out some guy to personally deliver bureau cards to, then retired to the shade. I missed a prop pitch motor deal by literal seconds, alas. Nothing else seemed interesting (meaning, affordable), so I went inside with the masses at noon. I visited the Cushcraft display, with their new, beefed-up 402CD, but I missed the Ten-Tec booth (where I'd told myself I'd "spin the dial" on an Omni 6 just one more time). I did spend some time at the TR booth, buying Tree's contest logging software (it's better than CT, especially using two radios for CW). I ate lunch with a group of guys who were wildly enthusiastic about their GPS gear. Hearing them talk, I was embarrassed I'd driven to Dayton armed only with my wits and a roadmap. At 2:00, I met Rog at the Antenna Forum. The program included: "New Low Band Receiving Antennas," by K9AY; "Comparing Tribanders," by K7LXC; "The FVR Spitfire Antenna," by K1VR; and "High Performance Transmitting Antennas for 160 Meters," by K1ZM. As usual, the theory, design and image presentations were all good, even inspiring. Kudos to K3LR for moderating another fine forum. After another nap and dinner (notice the pattern?), the old contesters headed back to the hotel suites. Once again, I set up the camera and conducted interviews, with Rog's help. K1AR was especially helpful, indicating he would discuss CQ's

possible sponsorship with Dick Ross at a breakfast meeting the next day (Sunday, John told me CQ was definitely interested, so now I am truly committed to finishing the editing by September). Again, we hung in until nearly 2:00 AM. (The crowd is getting older, and had thinned out by then, or maybe everyone wanted an early flea market start on Saturday.) After Waffle House omelets, we were again off, this time to the "alternate" Forum location-or Meadowdale High School. Considerable criticism has been leveled at the Hamvention folks for moving the DX and Contest Forums off-site. However, Rog and I were pleased with the shift. Parking is ample and free (we parked 50 feet from the front door). Bus service is quick and easy to Hara Arena (we were there in 10 air-conditioned-comfort minutes). Meals were good, and cheap (the same food would have been twice as expensive at the Arena). The A/V equipment was excellent. The only changes I might suggest would be a larger slide screen, and a different arrangement for the overhead projector (which was severely keystoned). The DX Forum included: "North Cook," by K8XP; "St. Peter & Paul Rocks," by PS7KM; "Sabaai-dii from Laos," by AH0W/OH2LVG; "8Q7AA," by K7WX; "9M0C," by G3NUG; and "ZK1XPP," by N6MZ. After lunch, the DXers and testers changed places in the room. The Contest Forum included: "To Win The World," a video by KU2M; "VP5FXB," by W0CG; "African Italy," by I4UFH and IV3TAN; "6Y4A," by N6BT and K2KW; "How to build an all-band contest station on a single tower," by NJ2L; "What do the UBN reports really mean?" by K3EST; and a panel discussion of "Winning Single-Op Strategies." After dinner, we headed back to the Crowne Plaza again; this time, I'd be a normal guy, mingling with the crowd-at least after the ARRL Contest Advisory Committee meeting was over. The evening was especially enjoyable (perhaps because previous nights had been spent in my normal work mode-shooting video). Again, we lasted until about 2:00 AM.

Highlights of the trip for N4ZC: "Icom's display, with people behind the equipment, answering questions about the two or three rigs in front of them, using a computer to get all the details right. The only drawback? Not being able to "see" the rig's front panel in front of them, everything was backwards, but overall, it seemed to work well. I especially liked the mobile van they had set up out in the fleamarket, where you could operate a rig," he said. (Ed. note: Rog DID recently buy a new radio. An Icom.) "And," Rog added, "I think you don't have to look much further than the hospitality suites to see we're all getting older. The suites were pretty empty by 2 AM each night. I remember when the crowd was still heavy at 4 in the morning. I can remember staying up 'til 7 AM once, myself. We're showing our age, but I still enjoyed the trip. I liked K1ZM's talk, even though I don't like 160M myself. I enjoyed seeing 7Q7RM, who I worked in the 50s as ZD6RM. That was pretty neat." (A short editorial pause in this recap, as Rog & Don actually count up the countries they saw represented at Dayton. Their total was 64, counting the good old USA.)

Highlights of the trip for K4ZA: the trip itself-Rog and I always have good talks. Plus, chats with several Ohio and Mad River Radio Club members; seeing some of the PVRC gang (even being asked to return to "the 20M chair" at W3LPL this fall; word travels fast on the M-M grapevine); asking good questions and shooting what I hope will be a good video; meeting I4UFH, I4JMY; some laughs with Doctor Bafoofnik; wondering how I could somehow afford K0XG's 55G guy ring bearings (they're beautifully made, & I've always wanted a rotating tower, stacked with monobanders); wondering just what all the "new hams" (old callsigns seem pretty much in the minority) are doing within our hobby.... Does this sound like something you shouldn't miss? I certainly hope so. Wait 'til next year!

If anything in this story piques your interest or curiosity, and you wish now you'd actually attended the blessed event, you can view some of the proceedings on the World Wide Web courtesy of K8CX.

<http://paradox2010.com/ham/>

Tom has 105 photographs from the Dayton Hamvention available at this site. Enjoy!

Another interesting online tool (courtesy of the U.S. Naval Observatory) can be found at:

http://riemann.usno.navy.mil/AA/data/docs/RS_OneDay.html#formb

(Ed. note: I see Microsoft has automatically covered up the underline between RS & OneDay in the address.) This tool allows you to compute sunrise/sunset data for any location. Useful especially if you're a low band type DXer.

FYI

An interesting development at the K4ZA homestead is the recent destruction of my phone answering machine & computer-apparently through a surge which came in on the phone line itself. Insurance claims are underway. But until those are resolved, I DO NOT have Internet access, or e-mail, or even the ability to produce this newsletter (the old Mac Classic files come to the rescue again) with any speed or facility. If you've tried to send me information or even a simply inquiry, you've gotten an "undeliverable" message by now, & this explains why. It's tough, being without a computer-I'm finding out just how much I take mine for granted. I hope to have this situation resolved in time for the next issue!

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It's time for that perennial favorite-CDXA's "woodshed" meeting. The year, we'll be meeting at the Stanley, NC restaurant (The Woodshed) on Friday, August 7th, 1998. Reception will be at 5 PM; dinner will commence at 6 PM. Dinner will include a 10-oz rib eye steak, for \$19.25. Brown bag drinks are acceptable, and a "few exceptions" of chicken will be allowed, in lieu of the steak dinner.

Please RSVP to Cliff Wagoner, W4WN, via PacketCluster, or telephone at 598-5373, or e-mail using pmqd44a@prodigy.com

Our speaker for the evening will be Roger Webb, W4MW. Roger will present an overview of 2-meter EME (earth-moon-earth, or moonbounce) activity, including some history, what type of gear it takes, and some ways to approach it. Roger is an accomplished EME operator, with 48 states and 35 countries worked. (His signals travel half a million miles-which puts those FO0FRcontacts you made the other day into new perspective! His presentation will include recordings of EME signals.) An evening not to be missed if you consider yourself a "true blue DXer."

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